



“We butted heads so nicely”: Considering ‘grassroots think-tanks’ and science shops to generate new knowledge by connecting ‘local’ and ‘expert’ knowers in community-campus partnerships

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Summary

There is a growing acceptance of involving grassroots, low-income people directly in leadership roles to design solutions intended to positively impact their lives (e.g., ATD Fourth World, 2000; UN, 2000). When community members are involved with the design and implementation of solutions to community problems, those interventions are proven to have better outcomes (e.g., Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ), 2004). But including marginalized people in decision-making processes is not easy. Hardina (2003) describes the ways in which their participation is often co-opted or designed to fail because of the possibility they might threaten existing power structures.

Community-campus partnerships sponsored by higher education can help support this effort. To date, research on the community perspective of community-campus partnerships usually involves community-based professionals with institutional affiliations rather than residents (e.g., Sandy & Holland, 2006; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009). Sponsored by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Community Outreach Partnership Program, the “grassroots think-tank” partnership functioned as a

voluntary association that included over 40 low-income residents and representatives from K - 12 institutions, churches, community-based organizations, and higher education institutions.

This paper will analyze how the deliberative processes did and did not meet the challenges of integrating the knowledge of grassroots participants and 'expert' knowers to generate new knowledge and actions together. The author will compare and contrast the deliberative-based partnership model with the model of science shops, which is usually an entity set up in an academic setting "to provide participatory research support to concerns experienced by civil society" (Steinhaus, 2007); similarities and distinctions will be addressed, and the author will provide an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of each. Narratives of grassroots community partner members are integrated using a conversation-based hermeneutic research method (Gadamer, 1960/1975; Herda, 1999; Sandy, 2011).

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